WOMEN IN COMMUNITY STUDIES AND RESEARCH:

THE PRACTICE OF EXCLUSION

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What I am going to focus on here is the situation of women and the way, in our approaches to studies of communities, women are excluded, women's work and interests go unrecognised, and women's experience is unaccounted for. It is my view that only if we make women's work, life, and experience in society fully visible, can we begin to understand what the problems are and to formulate what may be ameliorations if not solutions. I'm going to begin by showing how our practice in research makes women invisible and to look at some of the values and assumptions that are built into and around this exclusion.

On page 1. of the Province, Vancouver's morning newspaper, in an article reporting on a local court case, Les Bewley, a provincial court judge, was quoted as saying:

> You know, women don't get much brains before they're 30 anyway...but at the age of 18 or so they make some stupid mistakes mostly because we males who know better, lead them into it. (p.1)

These assumptions about women's characteristics and abilities are so much a part of the way we think that such statements go virtually unquestioned. They are not only the province of judges. The following is a quotation from a bartender which appears in a study of the lives and working conditions of cocktail waitresses; The Cocktail Waitress Woman's Work in a Man's World by James Spradley and Brenda Mann, John Wiley, 1975. He explained to the cocktail waitress:

> ...We call you dummy because we love you. We really don't mean it. It's just that we want it to be that way we are the men and you are the women. That's our way of recognizing that you are female. You should appreciate that. We mean it in a nice way. I respect your intelligence and all that. You contribute a lot. But you have to understand that I am a man and that's the way I want it to be.

The social roles then are for men to be dominant and women to be submissive. This principle is so much taken for granted that it is rarely questioned and it appears as an assumption in many less visible and obvious forms. In the area of research I want to look at some of these.

I'm going to talk about two books which lay out some of the general rules for doing research, and I will then go on to show how women are excluded from some Canadian Studies.

The study of communities by a method called 'participant observation' has long been a tool of anthropologists. This approach involves direct participation in the community, knowledge of it is derived from the understanding that develops between the anthropologist and the people. The account that ultimately is given interprets the experience and learning of the anthropologist in the community. In the books that discuss and set out the rules for undertaking this kind of work, the assumption is that the research worker or anthropologist is male, and the experience that forms part of the account and presentation must then be given from a man's perspective. The following quotations from a book entitled Field Methods in the Study of Culture by Thomas Rhys Williams will make this clearer:

> The anthropologist must be fully aware of his role and must not confuse his status as an observer and interpreter of culture with that of the agent of directed and induced culture change...(p.47)
>
> ....
>
> As the anthropologist comes to have to live without the material culture so familiar in his urban Western life,...he comes to be aware of himself and his culture in new ways. He discovers how he stands, walks and gestures, the patterns and logical forms of his thoughts, his assumptions of order, progress, and time The world around him takes on new meaning...

In these comments on fieldwork note how the neutral 'anthropologist' becomes 'he' in every instance. It is important for us as women to be

aware that this does exclude us, for the use of the pronouns is not accidental, it creates a focus of attention and interest, a direction of thought and investigation, and reflects a stance and experience in the world.

The problem is not that it is man's perspective in and of the world that we are asked to see but that we are taught that this view includes us. It gives us the objective mode in which we learn to see and reveal the world so that conventionally we speak of a 'perspective' or 'view' on or of a subject and do not naturally or necessarily raise the question as to whose perspective it is that provides the framework. His authority gives us the right to speak and the rules of appropriate argument and discussion and our experience and knowledge of the world, as women, is subsumed by it. We must become aware that ail 'statements', 'views', 'perspectives', 'opinions', are created by or given by somenone who is male or female, and whose presentation is coloured by the sex appropriate experiences. Once we attribute presentations and interpretations of the world correctly, we as women will be able to add our knowledge, experience and understanding of the world, and we can then arrive at a generalised perspective that will include both female and male views of the world.

Womens views of and experiences in the world are excluded by the very rules that we take for granted, Malinowski, one of the founding fathers (!) of anthropology gives the following instruction as to our task:

> ... These (three) lines of approach lead us to the final goal, of which an Ethnographer should never lose sight. This goal is, briefly, to grasp the natives point of view, his relation to life, to realize <u>his</u> vision of <u>his</u> world. (Aronauts 1922: 4-25)
> Williams p.63

The rule given here asks us to focus on the men's view of their world, "her vision" of "her world" is not included as a part of our task. It is the recognition first of all of this omission and then its remedy

that I think we should all undertake.

Community or participant observation studies reflect only one approach, survey and statistical research is another and has built into it similar difficulties. I am focussing here on the rules for carrying out the work, not on the results. In W.J. Reichmann's book Uses and Abuses of Statistics the following points are made:

> It is not uncommon for male respondents to be particularly susceptible to the charms and general appearance of an interviewer... (p.265)

It is hard to imagine, under the circumstances, that the interviewer is male, as becomes apparent in the following statement:

> Interviewing is not an easy task...It can be very exasperating indeed. An interviewer's patience may suffer if she meets too many people who cannot make up their minds... (p.268)

Women are the interviewers throughout, and note who structures the enterprise:

> The statistician is often thought of as a man of another world... even if he is personally accepted as beyond reproach, the statistics in which he deals are themselves liable to be suspect...(p.12)

Again here it is taken for granted that men have the authority, direct the projects, research enterprises, women carry out their appointed tasks under men's direction. We are the interviewers not the statisticians who take responsibility for direction and outcome. It is important here again for us to recognise the framework of exclusion and to seek to alter it through this recognition. This involves both changing the pronouns and the assumptions about who appropriately carries out the tasks. Women need to take authority, and we need to increase the number of women trained in the appropriate skills.

I want to look now at some specific Canadian examples. Gerald Gold, in a study of a small Quebec town in which he lived for a while, notes

the role of women in the following way:

> A family enterprise begins with the participation of the owners wife as bookkeeper, clerk, and manager. While authority within the business has not been consistently measured, in numerous cases women were powerful inside decision makers, with an equal or dominant role in controlling the family firm. Business wives however, do not represent the firm in public or belong to service clubs with other business women. Their participation in business affairs is added to their household responsibilities and to raising the children. (p.104)
>
> ....
>
> (From the Interview Sample)
> Sex All except two of the business persons are males. The two female managers are in business because of the death or illness of their husbands, and expressed little interest in business as an occupation.

As these statements stand they read as a dismissal. In the first, because women do not participate in the public or man's world their work is seen as being inconsequent. What this fails to take account of is the considerable importance of the support system that women are providing for work in the public world. To provide support as bookkeeper, clerk, manager, housekeeper, and child-raiser involves a large amount of work. It is this work that is essentially invisible from a man's perspective. The second statement is also worth noting briefly for the social situation it dismisses. Women take on business responsibilities in addition to their other tasks and duties. They do not move by right in the business circle but by default. There is no support system for them. Lack of interest must be understood in the context that creates it.

In both these cases the problem is not that the situation of women has been inadequately discussed, though that is also the case, but that women's work goes unrecognised. It would be possible in a study that focusses on the world of men to make that explicit and to leave open the avenue to a complementary study of the world of women. But this complement is not visible. We are trained to understand the world of

men as 'the world' and to exclude all tasks and responsibilities that fall outside the public sphere. That women's roles are secondary is both an assumption and a practice but this tells us only about the nature of the society, not about the work women do nor about the experience that is a part of doing it. It is this omission that needs to be remedied. Women are members of the society and this recognition needs to be built into the approach to a study from the beginning.

A study that provides a rather different approach, one that does refer to women but does not fully include us is Res A. Lucas's book Minetown, Milltown, Railtown: Life in Canadian Communities of Single Industry. What his approach shows is that reference alone does not mean inclusion.

Looking at this book if we begin by asking whose life are we going to be talking about ? The answer is it is men's lives and working and living patterns that are the focus. A perspective that remains unstated. Women's work and lives then are seen from this perspective. It is important to be clear what this omits. Entries in the index will give a quick indication of how men and women are differentially seen:

> Females, education of 107,110,288,298-300,383; and interpersonal relationships 167-8; and marriage 95,110; mobility of 383; work for 95,100,110. See also marital status. (p. 424)
>
> Males, education for 288-9; mobility of 387; occupations for 143, 354-9; student 298-300. See also marital status. (p.426)

Entries relating to women appear under the heading 'housewives' (p.425) and'wives' (p.433). These entries give an indication of the relative importance, all we can find out about women appears under the headings given. The entry for males is shorter but then that's what the rest of the book is about. If we think for a moment of the differences

in the headings then we can note that women 'work', men have 'occupations', there is a heading for wives and housewives, there is no heading for 'husband', 'interpersonal relationships' does not appear for men as a focus (men appear under the heading interpersonal relationships...). What this means is that marriage is seen as a career for women, and women become partially visible in this context only. I say partially visible here for what is left out is women's work and life experience in carrying out their enterprises in making that career. Because the focus is on men's work, women's work is not seen either as work or the support system that makes possible the maintenance of men at work in the labour force. There is no account of 'housework' or 'child-raising'.

Again what is needed is the recognition of the existence of women's work and worlds in their own right, the view given that women depend on men for the making and running of their lives is correct but what this leaves out is the reality of those lives and the work that in its own right is a part of them. Creating a framework in which women's work is ignored or dismissed, or seen as irrelevant is a part of our training. Changing that training means changing our view of the world and of women in the world, of women's work and lives, in other words it means creating a woman's perspective, a perspective from which women speak and the recognition of which would make difficult the kind of dismissal, a last general example of which I want to give here.

In a book entitled Approaching Sociology: A Critical Introduction, the authors Margaret A. Coulson and Carol Riddell introduce 'women' in the following way:

> Who asks whom to dance? Who usually takes most part in bringing up the children in a marriage? Who does more of the cooking? of the housework? Who is more likely to stop work on marriage?...(p.27)

The questions are not hard to answer. In the discussion which follows however, womens work is not discussed, nor are the reasons why we automatically respond 'women' and go on to something more interesting or relevant, explored. We take for granted that we already know what women do, housework needs no further discussion. Women's work therefore, if it is seen at all is seen in framework of what we already know and need not investigate further.

In looking at women's work in the home we need to become aware of two problems:

1. The first is the problem I've just mentioned that the work women do is taken for granted. It is taken for granted in the sense we assume we know what that work is, how it gets done, and further we take for granted that it gets done. An example of this in action comes from "Diary of a Mad Househusband" by Michael Weiss in Women in a Changing World ed. Uta West p. 66-67:

> Then I remembered that I had still not washed the lunch dishes or decided what to make for supper. I washed the dishes and turned over the record and began to prepare a supper of vegetables and rice and a salad. Everybody came home and I kissed my wife and I knew that everybody in the house would want to go to sleep before I did. And that when I went to sleep my body would be tired but my mind would not be. And so I would not really rest. And my tensions would grow.
>
> Everybody said supper was very good.
>
> Afterward, still sitting around the table, I talked about how I wanted to write a story about the demoralizing and destructive effects housekeeping had on me, about what I felt like being a househusband. About how everyday I felt I was losing a little bit more of the resources I need to feel capable and worthwhile. And about how, even so, escape was far easier for me than for a woman whose education had been designed to teach her to disregard her own instincts and experience and to believe that as a housewife she would be performing her natural task. And that was when Alan, who lives in the ...house with me when he's not out there doing all those important things in the world that most men do, said with surprise: "You mean you've been cleaning up the house everyday?"

2. The second problem is that the work is trivialised or undervalued. Women who work in the home frequently see themselves as doing 'nothing' and housework is not defined or seen as 'real work'. Either by those who do it or by the society at large. For example "Just a Housewife" from Studs Terkel's Working:

> How would I describe myself? It'll sound terrible- just a housewife. (Laughs.) It's true. What is a housewife? You don't have to have any special talents. I don't have any.
>
> First thing I do in the morning is come in the kitchen and have a cigarette. Then I'll put the coffee on and whatever else we're gonna have for breakfast...Then I'll make one lunch for young Bob - when school's on, I pack more - and I get them off to work. I'll usually throw a load of clothes in the washer while I'm waiting for the next batch to get up out of bed, and carry on from there. It's nothing really.
>
> Later I'll clean house and sew, do something. I sew a lot of dresses for Cathy and myself. I brought this sewing machine up here years ago. It belongs here, this is my room and I love it, the kitchen.
>
> I start my dinner real early because I like to fuss. I'll bake, cook...
>
> ....
>
> Somebody who goes out and works for a living is more important than somebody who doesn't. What they do is very important in the business world. What I do is only important to five people. I don't like putting a housewife down, but everybody has done it for so long. It's sort of the thing you do. Deep down I feel that what I do is important. But you just hate to say it, because what are you? Just a housewife? (Laughs.)
>
> I love being a housewife. Maybe that's why I feel so guilty. I shouldn't be happy doing what I'm doing... (pp. 299,300,301)

From Women in the Labour Force: Facts and Figures 1975:

> The labour force is that portion of the (civilian non-institutional) population 14 years of age and over who, at the time of the survey, were employed, or unemployed. Persons not counted as in the labour force include those...who were going to school, keeping house, too old or otherwise unable to work, and voluntarily idle or retired... (p.52)

This principle of the way house work is undervalued, and indeed the person doing it too, is shown very clearly in a book called The Kitchen Sink Papers: My Life as A Househusband (The Tale Mike McGrady Lived to Tell) written by Mike McGrady, who quit his job as a journalist in order to keep house and look after the children while his wife ran her business and supported them. He speaks of his experience in the following way:

> Talking to a business colleague over lunch...
> "...This morning I sent in a letter of resignation. I'm quitting the job."
> "Yeah, and what you gonna do for money now?"
> "My wife's going to pay the bills for a while."
> "Beautiful," he said, "What happened, she come into money?"
> "She works, she's got her own business."
> "And what you gonna do while she's out chasing up the buck?"
> "I haven't figured that one out yet," I said, "I'm figuring on doing what she does - I'll stay home and make sure the kids get fed and the house is clean and like that."
> "You're putting me on."
> "Nope."
> "Well, you oughtta be putting me on," he said. "What kind of work is that for a man to do? I can't imagine any real man settling for a chickenshit life like that." (p.15)
>
> ....
>
> Talking in a pub...
> "And what have you been up to McGrady?"..."What have you been up to since you left the rag?"
> How many times did I hear that question throughout the year? There was nothing wrong with the question except my inability to answer it.
> "Nothing" I said.
> "Nothing?" (p.161)

In considering this example it is important to be aware that it is written by a man. We have very few accounts given by women of their work experience, of what it means to devote a lifetime to managing the house and raising children. A man's experience of it casts the work in a different light but it is important to see that the status of the work

remains the same. The number of accounts given by women is increasing but there is still a great deal more we need to know.

When we look at these examples we can see that the failure in all of them is the failure to recognise that housework and, in general, the women who do it, provide a support system essential to the maintenance and continuation of the public working world.

Dorothy Smith puts it this way:

> If we focus on the economic aspects the home can be described as that social unit which maintains the capacity of those at work or at school to function effectively in their roles outside the home. From this point of view the home is a place where people are stored when they are not at work, where they are maintained and serviced, fed and cleaned, where they are psychologically repaired and the injuries of the daily routines on the job or at school are made good... (Mat. Prpp. mimeo. p.3)

In conclusion, let me say again, that what we need to do is to begin to talk about women's work, to create a new framework for making it visible, to take seriously the task of describing it, even where it sounds familiar! It is through creating this visibility, through sharing our knowledge and experience of our worlds, that we create the basis for communication. Without visibility and without communication there is no possibility that women's needs in this society will be recognised or met.

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